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ABSTRACT

Changing student needs and strategies for adapting college or university programs to meet these needs are discussed. Significant changes in the composition of student enrollments during the past 30 years include an increase in the number of veterans, minorities, handicapped, older adults, women, and foreign students. Four possible strategies are suggested for adapting programs to meet student needs. These institutional strategies include: innovation, development, specialization, and diversification. It is suggested that successful change will depend on the institution's ability to identify factors affecting student decisions to attend school, to reshape the institution to achieve these goals, and to publicize information on the suitability of the school for meeting student needs. The importance of survey research in selecting the most appropriate change strategy for an institution is discussed. Examples of types of strategies appropriate for specific schools are cited including both traditional and nontraditional institutions. It is suggested that implementation of one of the four strategies should lead to increased enrollment and an improved educational program. (Author/SF)

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MEASURING STUDENT NEEDS FOR UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AND SELECTING APPROPRIATE CURRICULAR DESIGNS

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ABSTRACT

Over the past thirty years, significant changes have occurred in the composition of student enrollments at colleges and universities around the country, with the impact of various new types of clientele, including veterans, minorities, the handicapped, older adults, and the foreign students. Institutions have responded to these new changes with special forms of counseling, alterations in their curriculum, and additional services to meet particular student needs. This paper describes four possible strategies for adapting a college or university program to the needs of students, as well as a means for selecting among them. It is assumed that as a result of identifying and implementing the appropriate strategy, an institution develops a clear purpose and sense of identity and is more responsive to the needs of its clientele.

MEASURING STUDENT NEEDS FOR UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AND SELECTING APPROPRIATE CURRICULAR DESIGNS

The American college and university now serves an incredibly more varied student body than was the case in 1945. With the end of World War II and the passage of the G.I. Bill, colleges and universities enrolled students in large numbers who were considerably older and more mature than was traditional. The Korean War, the cold war, and the Vietnamese War maintained the flow of veterans to the campuses. In recent years, still older students have become common on campuses as lifelong learning has become a serious element in American life. Since the mid-fifties, equity has increasingly become a national educational goal, bringing Blacks and, more recently, Hispanics and Native Americans to campuses. This diversity has been increased even further by the growing number of foreign students and, still more recently, by programs that are taking the special needs of handicapped students into account.

In response to these changes in the student body, the curriculum, services, and goals of a college education expanded and underwent far-reaching changes. Each new type of student required particular types of assistance, and colleges responded with counseling and other programs for each. Counseling itself became one of the vast number of new fields that students could

select for study. The computer and the growth of scientific knowledge contributed to the diversification of the curriculum. Minorities demanded and got departments and courses dealing with their own history and culture, further diversifying the curriculum. Protest movements led some campuses to depart from traditional grading systems, or to create experimental colleges offering courses that departed radically from traditional subjects of study. Faculty became heavily involved in consulting for government and industry, and in seeking federal grants to support their research. Buildings are now being altered or designed to meet the needs of physically handicapped students.

Three decades of rapid expansion in the number and type of both students and services appears to be over. American higher education faces a period, not so much of "no growth," but of "slow growth" after a period of retrenchment to adjust for recent overexpansion. Administrators, whose only experience has been the management of growth, are searching for strategies appropriate to the new situation.

This paper suggests four different strategies as a means of adapting a college or university program to the needs of students. One or more of these strategies may be appropriate at a particular campus. The paper also suggests a means of selecting among them. These four strategies, and their

relationship to programs and students, are indicated in Figure 1 below. The second section of the paper discusses a possible means of selecting among the four possible strategies. The third section of the paper describes each of the four strategies in detail.

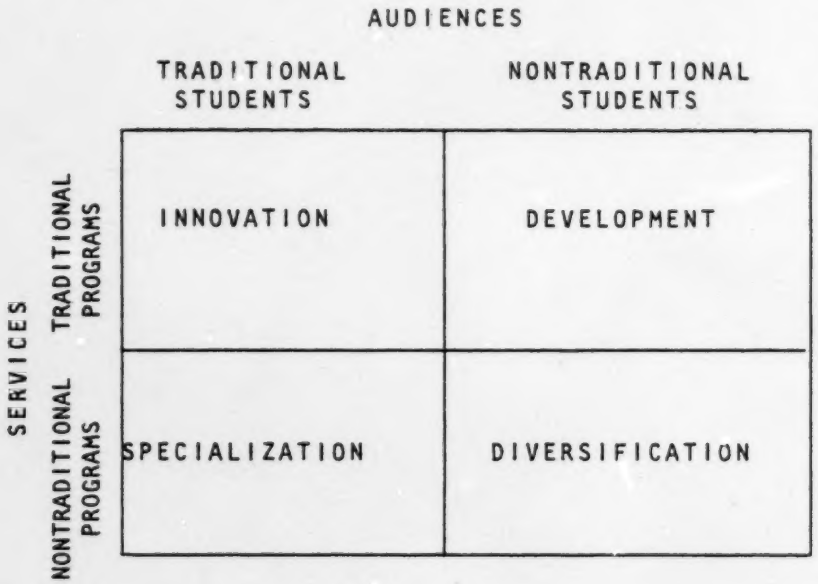

Figure 1. Institutional Adaptation Strategies as a Function of Programmatic Offerings and Student Clientele.

II

Students choose a particular school for any number of factors. If those that are relatively important to students and that are relatively easy for the administrator to control or change can be identified, then the possibility for action exists. The factors

will vary widely among schools. Among the possibilities are:

1. The cost of attending school.
2. The flexibility each student has in shaping his own program.
3. The intellectual atmosphere.

Each of these factors may be conceptualized as a continuum, and the perceived position of a school on each may be determined by comparison with other institutions. If the factors are considered together as a three-dimensional space (Figure 2), then a particular institution will occupy a particular position. The more accurately the position reflects student needs, and the greater its distance in space from all other institutions, the more likely the school is to have increasing, rather than decreasing, enrollment. The actual factors, and their number, may vary considerably among schools.

The task of the administration is to identify the "X" factors that actually affect student decisions about attending college and are under some degree of administrative control, determine an advantageous position in the X-dimensional space, reshape the institution to achieve the goals implied by the position, and insure that prospective students receive information on the suitability of the school to their needs.

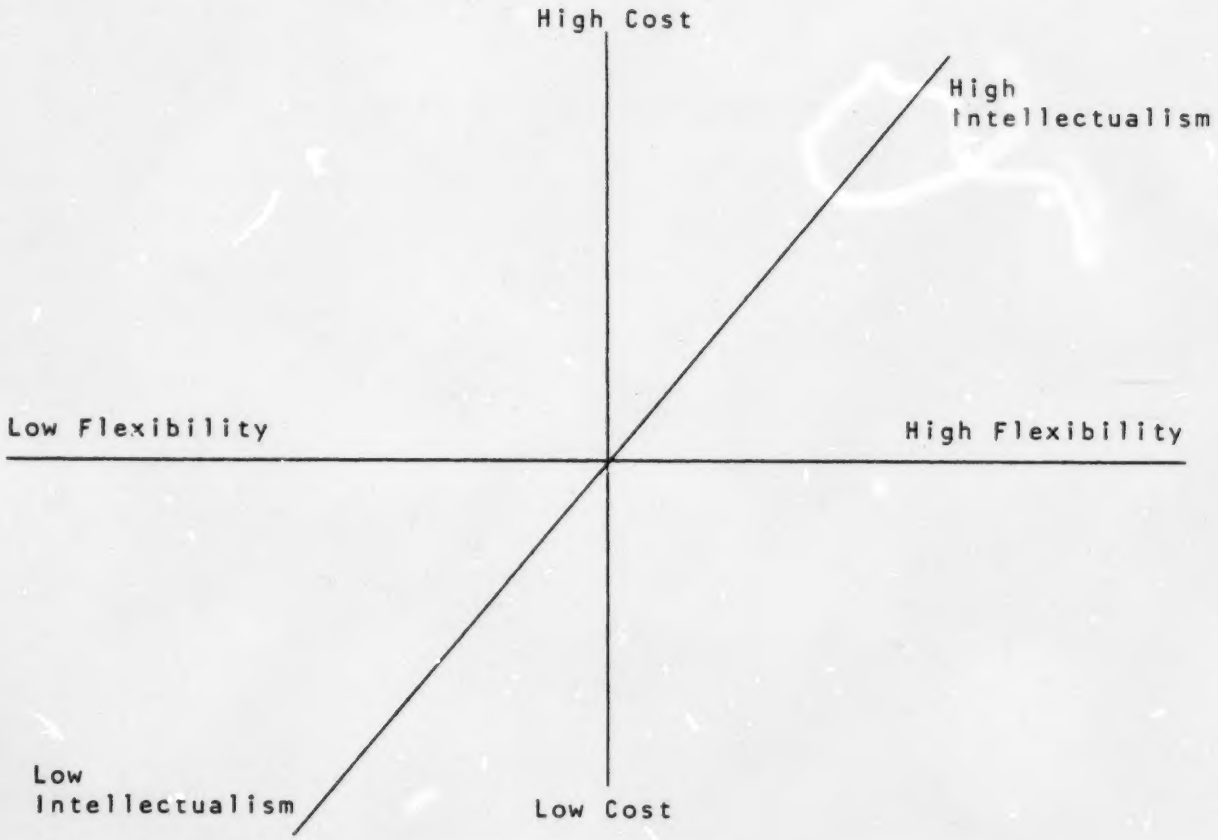

Figure 2. Model for Comparative Institutional Positioning as a Function of Perceived Student Need Factors.

One way to initiate this process is to conduct a survey using a semantic differential instrument consisting of several items to measure the position of the school relative to one or more similar schools on each of the "X" factors. The population of interest are all students who *might* have chosen the college or university, and not those who actually did. It includes those who went to

other colleges and those who went to no college but were qualified to do so. The means of sampling this population will vary considerably from one college to another.

Data from this survey can be analyzed to identify the relative location of the school in the X-dimensional space. Basically, the school should attempt to occupy an area of unmet demand. This is not necessarily the point furthest from all other schools. The survey will not have collected information on all possible schools. More important, there may not be sufficient students for a viable program interested in the particular combination of factors represented -- just as, for example, the market for three-wheeled cars is extremely small.

III

The location on the X-dimensional space that is selected by a particular college will suggest one of four strategies mentioned earlier as most appropriate to institutional development.

A school emphasizing traditional programs for traditional students, such as Williams, emphasizing a liberal arts curriculum for talented middle and upper class students, should concentrate upon the innovative improvement of

current programs and services.

A school emphasizing traditional services for nontraditional students, such as Gallaudet or Spellman, must focus upon specialized curriculum development aimed at the learning problems of its particular students. Faculty should be supported by specialists in curriculum development, and an atmosphere conducive to their working together must be created.

A school emphasizing nontraditional programs for traditional students must specialize in aspects of particular fields which traditional schools do not emphasize, and for which there is reasonable demand. The California School of Professional Psychology has taken a humanistic approach that contrasts strongly with the research emphasis of most institutions granting doctorates in psychology. The administration of such a school must be particularly sensitive to changing interests of potential students, as well as to changing employment opportunities for graduates.

Finally, a school emphasizing nontraditional programs for nontraditional students, such as Navajo Community College, must adopt a strategy of diversification. It must both develop instructional strategies that aim to overcome learning difficulties of students, and provide the specialized curriculum needed to meet the needs of the students it serves.

IV

The strategies suggested above are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the number that any one college or university can pursue will depend to a large extent upon its resources. Major universities such as Michigan or UCLA have the resources to pursue all four strategies. But, the many smaller institutions in the country might more appropriately concentrate their energies upon a single strategy. Such an approach will result in a clear institutional purpose and a clear institutional identity. It will provide a basis for making many administrative decisions as to the appropriateness of new ideas. The strategy will give the college or university a clear reputation, nationally or regionally, for meeting particular needs, and, if carefully chosen, should lead to increased enrollment and an improved educational program.